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## Learning from fiction and theories of fictional content

Kathleen Stock

### 1. Introduction

The question of fictional content is the question of what, in a fiction, counts as ‘fictionally true’. Much of a work’s fictional content will be obvious and ‘explicit’. For instance, in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, it is explicitly fictionally true that

With Rose walked Miss Brodie, head up, like Sybil Thorndike, her nose arched and proud. She wore her loose brown tweed coat with the beaver collar tightly buttoned, her brown felt hat with the brim up at one side and down at the other (Spark 1965: 28).

The content of these sentences is relatively quickly accessed by the competent English speaker. But equally, what is fictionally true in a fiction can be non-explicit and rather, only ‘implied’. Implied fictional truths tend to emerge more slowly, often in conjunction with sentences later in the work, and/or some piece of background knowledge of the reader, not automatically retrieved upon reading the relevant sentences<sup>1</sup>. For instance, in Haruki Murakami’s *South of the Border, West of the Sun*, set in 80’s Tokyo, there’s no explicit mention that the scenario described is a post-Hiroshima one. Yet the following sentences effectively tell us so, via its implied reference to the shadows’ flash-burnt into the walls of Hiroshima, which the reader is assumed to already know about:

‘The four a.m. streets looked shabby and filthy. The shadow of decay and disintegration lurked everywhere, and I was part of it. Like a shadow burned into a wall’. (Murakami 2003: 72)<sup>2</sup>.

With this distinction at least roughly understood, we can divide theories of fictional content into two sorts. Some theories don’t differentiate between explicit and implied fictional content, and analyse both as detected via a single principle or set of principles. Into this group

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<sup>1</sup> This understanding of the explicit/ implied distinction is defended in Stock, forthcoming 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Without this mention – at least on the view I advocate (see below), the book might well have been set in a different 80’s Tokyo, where either the bomb had not fallen, or it was simply indeterminate whether the bomb had fallen or not. See also Stock forthcoming 2017.

fall the theories known as ‘actual author’ intentionalism (AAI), hypothetical intentionalism (HI), and value-maximising (VM) theory. Others focus only on implied fictional content. Into this category falls the well-known theory of David Lewis (1983) and its rivals (e.g. Currie 1990; Byrne 1993; Hanley 2004). For my purposes here, I’ll focus only on the former category: call these ‘totalising’ theories of fictional content.

Here are the standard presentations, respectively, of totalising theories AAI, HI, and VM, as articulated by well-known defenders. AAI subdivides into two versions: ‘extreme’, and ‘moderate’ (or ‘modest’). Extreme AAI is presented as the view that ‘the meaning of the text is fully determined by the actual intentions of the artist (or artists) who created it’ (Carroll 2000: 75. (A somewhat more detailed description of this position will be offered below). ‘Modest’ AAI is presented as the view that an author’s intentions are a *contributory* but *not the only* determinant of fictional truth and that ‘the correct interpretation of a text is the meaning of the text that *is compatible with* the actual author’s intention’ (Carroll 2000: 76, my italics). Meanwhile, HI moves away completely from reconstructing the actual author’s intentions or trying to, and instead argues that interpretation should focus upon reconstructing what, in the opinion of some idealized suitably informed and sensitive readership, would count as the intentions of a *hypothetical* (non-actual) author who wrote this very text (Levinson 2006: 303). The reason that this doesn’t just collapse into actual author intentionalism is because of a further commitment of HI: unlike for AAI, the evidence which may be appropriately called upon in anticipating these idealized responses *excludes* ‘essentially private – which is not to say epistemically inaccessible’ information about the actual author not available to the public domain (Levinson 2006: 306); ’ e.g. a ‘secret diary’ (Levinson 1992: 230) or other source. Hence the deliverances of AAI and HI may in principle come apart. Finally, value maximising theory is unconcerned with either actual or hypothetical authorial intentions: rather, it is the view that a fiction ‘is to be interpreted in ways that maximize its value as a work of literature’ so that as such - as with HI, in fact - ‘the focus .. is on what the work could mean rather than on what was meant by it’ (Davies 2006: 242).

AAI, HI, and VM as usually presented, not just as theories of fictional content but as theories of literary *meaning, generally*. This emphasis is unfortunate in the case of AAI, since there are obviously aspects of literary ‘meaning’ (at least loosely so called) that are not a result of actual authorial intentions. For instance, sometimes critics seek to understand the characterisation and plot of a work from the past in terms of contemporary theories of social

life, where the author couldn't possibly have intended any such comparisons. On Terry Eagleton's Marxist reading of *Wuthering Heights*, for example, Heathcliff 'represents a turbulent form of capitalist aggression which must historically be civilised' (1988: 115). Alternatively, a critic might impose a psychoanalytic or feminist reading, again put in terms that the author of the work in question could not have been expected to recognise and nor *a fortiori* intend. Such readings look like part of a work's 'meaning', loosely called. However, arguably they are not part of its content: it isn't fictionally true in *Wuthering Heights* that Heathcliff represents capitalist aggression, or at least not on the theory I favour (see below).

I've just noted a problem with characterising 'literary meaning' as the *explanandum* of a totalising theory, at least for AAI. Better, I suggest, to focus more narrowly on fictional content/ fictional truth. Perhaps even more problematically, some defenders of AAI and HI also tend to include the notion of 'meaning' in their *explanans*. For instance, it is sometimes said that extreme AAI is the view that the fictional content of a work (or literary meaning, as some would put it) is identical to what the author intended that work to *mean*. Alternatively: it is said that according to HI, what is fictionally true in a work is what, according to the idealized readership, a hypothetical author might have *meant* by this text. The problem here is that what it is *to intend a work to mean something*, or *to mean something by a text* is still inexplicit. Matters wouldn't be helped by changing the content of the relevant intention to 'intending a work to make certain things fictionally true'. What we are looking for, effectively, is a theory of fictional truth (or content); analysing fictional truth in virtue of an intention that a work has certain fictional truths would be obviously unhelpful.

It seems preferable to characterise the relevant intention, on the part of the author or hypothetical author, as an intention that the reader *imagine* something. After all, it is fairly uncontroversial (though not completely – see Matravers 2014) that fictions characteristically call for imagining. On this approach, AAI becomes the claim that (roughly) what is fictionally true in a fiction is whatever the actual author intended the reader to imagine. HI becomes the claim, roughly, that what is fictionally true in a fiction is determined by the appropriately informed and sensitive reader's best hypothesis, given certain restrictions on her evidence, about what an author of this work might have intended that reader to imagine. And, though VM is not really an intentionalist theory at all, one might still claim in a related vein that according to it, what is fictionally true in a fiction is whatever set of imaginings, on the part of the reader, would maximise the value of the work.

As well as eliminating an impression of circularity, this amendment has the further advantage, at least in the case of AAI, of connecting with one popular theory of what a fiction is. On that view, a fiction is, partly or wholly, a collection of utterances intended to be imagined (Currie 1990; Lamarque and Olsen 1994; Davies 2007; Stock, forthcoming 2017). Admittedly, any such connection is less secure in the case of HI, for the theory of fiction in question is concerned with intentions of actual authors, and not hypothetical ones; and it is wholly absent in the case of VM. Even so, defenders of these views might still adopt the theory in question, arguing that what makes a fiction a fiction is a different matter from what determines its content.

## 2. AAI in more detail

I'm a defender of 'extreme' AAI (see Stock, forthcoming 2017). In a rough sketch, here is the version of AAI I prefer. Fictions are exclusively composed of fictive utterances, where a 'fictive utterance' is understood as an utterance (a sentence) produced with a particular intention. Namely, the utterer of a fictive utterance  $u$  intends that the reader or hearer propositionally imagine some proposition  $p$ , and moreover, do so as a result of recognizing the former intention. That is, the intention is 'reflexive', in a manner made familiar by Grice (1957). In a reflexive intention, roughly, the utterer intends the hearer (or reader) to  $\Phi$ , and moreover intends that the former intention is recognised and counted by the hearer as a reason to  $\Phi$ .

Leaving aside certain complications about unreliable narration, which we don't need to go into here, we can say that: where the utterer of an utterance  $u$  reflexively intends that the reader/ hearer of  $u$  propositionally imagines some proposition  $p$ , then  $p$  is the fictional content of  $u$ , and a fictional truth in the associated work. Now, often, where via an utterance  $u$  an utterer reflexively intends the reader/ hearer of  $u$  to propositionally imagine that  $p$ , this intention will be easily identifiable and the content of  $u$  will be explicitly  $p$  (see above). But equally, it might well be relatively non-automatic for a reader to work out that effectively,  $u$  instructs the reader to imagine that  $p$ . In that case, the fact that content of  $u$  is  $p$  will be implied, so that  $p$  will be an implied fictional truth.

An additional point to note is that often, a single utterance  $u$  may have several propositions as its fictional content, some explicit, and some implied. To return to our earlier example, in the last two sentences of the passage from Murukami quoted earlier, it is explicitly fictionally true (i.e to be imagined) that *the shadow of decay and disintegration lurked everywhere*. It is

also fictionally true that *the narrator is part of the shadow of decay and disintegration* and perhaps too that *the narrator is speaking first-personally*. These fictional truths are explicit in the passage (i.e. relatively easily and automatically recoverable). But, I have suggested, it is also fictionally true— that is, the reader is reflexively intended to imagine - that *the narrator utters this* (indicating the sentences) *in a post-Hiroshima world*. This is fictional content that is not so easily recoverable from the immediate appearance of the sentences, and so counts as implied.

So: fictive utterances can function as sometimes compressed instructions to imagine various things, and this is what gives them their fictional content, both explicit and implied<sup>3</sup>. Equally though, I will suggest, certain utterances can have a dual function: they can be included in order to intentionally instruct readers to imagine certain things, *and* they can simultaneously be intended to function as invitations to *believe* certain things. That is, they can function as pieces of testimony. It is in this capacity, I shall argue, that an objection to HI and VM emerges.

### 3. Testimony in general

First, let's review some basics about testimony, generally. The production of testimony is an intentional speech act, I'll assume. In the paradigm case, for some proposition *p*, the utterer of 'p' intends to transfer the belief that *p* to the hearer (or reader) of her utterances. For instance, when I tell my students that they will have an exam on Thursday, I intend to produce in them the belief that they will have an exam on Thursday. Moreover, a piece of testimony purports to be a source of independent warrant for the hearer's belief in its truth: the hearer is supposed to believe what is said at least partly on the say-so of the utterer. When a teacher tells her pupil that Mount Everest is the highest mountain on earth, the student needn't have access to an independent check of the truth of this belief. Following Pritchard, I'll characterize a *testimony-based belief*, meanwhile, as 'any belief which one reasonably and directly forms in response to what one reasonably takes to be testimony and which is essentially caused and sustained by testimony' (2004: 326).

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<sup>3</sup> I have said nothing here about the strategies by which an author may signal her intentions to a competent sensitive reader; discussing these would take me too far afield.

Here, in a sketch, are three rival models of how testimony is often thought to operate, in terms of the justification of any resultant beliefs on the hearer's part<sup>4</sup>. The first, the '*a posteriori* model', says that a piece of testimony is justified where there is accompanying *a posteriori* evidence for its truth. The accompanying evidence might be about the speaker in particular: her sincerity, or trustworthiness, or reliability, or expertise (this sort of evidence is emphasized by Fricker 1995). Or, perhaps, the evidence might be more general: e.g. inductive evidence of a general correlation between testimony (that is, intentional speech acts aimed at transmitting belief) and truth *a posteriori*. Either way, on this sort of view one has no 'presumptive right to believe in what one is told just as such' (Fricker 1995: 399)<sup>5</sup>. One must have access to positive *a posteriori* reasons to believe in a piece of testimony, albeit perhaps not consciously (Fricker 1995: 406).

The second model, the '*a priori* model', says that testimony is justified because there are *a priori* reasons to think that testimony is good evidence of truth. For instance, one might argue that the function of reason itself depends upon reliance upon apparently rational sources (Burge 1993: 469). There are other variations too (see for instance Coady 1992). The important point is that on this general sort of view, one does not need *a posteriori* evidence to justify belief in the truth of testimony. However it's also important to note that, nonetheless, one might encounter *a posteriori* evidence which forces *doubt* about the truth of testimony in a particular case; in which general *a priori* grounds for justification will be greatly weakened. So one should monitor for doubt accordingly (see Faulkner 2007: 877).

On a third view, which we can call the 'Assurance model', testimony does not derive its justification from any connection to empirical evidence, nor from *a priori* reasons in the sense just outlined (Moran 2006). Moran argues that the previous two models each effectively treat testimony as a kind of evidence of a person's (true) beliefs, and moreover not specially different from other kind of non-verbal or verbal behaviour which might count as evidence for a person's (true) beliefs. Yet in fact testimony, when treated as a form of evidence of true belief, looks more susceptible to manipulation than, for instance, non-verbal behaviour typically is, since testimony is deliberate: the utterer has chosen to reveal something, which she otherwise might have withheld. This seems to make that behaviour less

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<sup>4</sup> This is not supposed to be exhaustive. The taxonomy is largely modelled on that of Moran (2006).

<sup>5</sup> The view counts as 'reductionist' in the terminology of many surveys, since it says that the justification for believing in testimony that *p* depends on further justification derived from inference, memory and/or perception (Fricker 1995:394).

reliable as a form of evidence than it would have been, had it been non-deliberate (2006: 6). Instead, Moran proposes, we should make a virtue out of the freely-given, deliberate nature of testimony by treating it as partly deriving its justification from its intentional nature. In testimony, the speaker presents the claim as one she is responsible for: she ‘offers a kind of guarantee for this truth’ (2006:11). It is a special kind of assertoric speech act which derive its justification from ‘the speaker’s attitude toward his utterance and presentation of it in a certain spirit’ (2006:23). That is (adapting Grice), Moran suggests that in a piece of testimony ‘p’, the utterer of ‘p’ intends both that hearers believe that *p*, and that they think of her as assuming responsibility for the utterance as a reason to believe that *p*. An analogy is made with promise making: a promise is not offered as or taken as evidence for what will happen, except in odd cases, but rather as an assurance that it will (2006: 24).

#### 4. Testimony-in-fiction

With this background in place, let’s turn to fiction. Fictions sometimes contain pieces of testimony (Green 2010). Here’s a clear example, from Karen Joy Fowler’s *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*, informing the reader about some concrete historical events:

‘Nonhuman animals have gone to court before. Arguably, the first ALF action in the United States was the release of two dolphins in 1977 from the University of Hawaii. The men responsible were charged with grand theft. Their original defense, that dolphins are persons (humans in dolphin suits, one defendant said), was quickly thrown out by the judge’ (Fowler 2013: 305)

But testimony-in-fiction need not be confined to the concrete. It can also take the form of general statements, as in the following examples, from *Daniel Deronda* and *Anna Karenina* respectively:

There is a great deal of unmapped country within us which would have to be taken into account in an explanation of our gust and storms (Eliot 1986: 321)

Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way (Tolstoy 1995: 1)

In cases such as these, the utterance made is stipulated as true of fictional events in the story in question, and extends at least that far (that is – on the view I favour – the reader is intended to imagine that such claims are true of all the characters in the work). However, it also seems clear from context that each author intends her utterance to extend beyond the fictional



scenario she describes, to the actual world. The utterances in question make some state of affairs true in the fiction *and* alert the reader to some state of affairs in the actual world, according to the author. In other words, I take it, we can take such utterances as effectively offering a conjoined instruction ‘imagine that *p* *and* believe that *p*’<sup>6</sup>.

One might worry here that, despite appearances, there are no genuine cases of testimony-in-fiction because authors of fictions, as such, don’t and indeed can’t intend to convey belief in the requisite manner. At a minimum all three models of testimony just canvassed require that testimony is the result of an intention to pass on true information. One might admit that fictions can contain non-accidentally true utterances – after all, many fictions seem ‘based on reality’ - but still, one might deny that any such non-accidentally true utterances are intentionally included in a fiction *because* they are true (something similar is argued, though in a different context, by Davies 2007: 47).

Yet this seems false. For in certain cases, there appears to be good reason to grant that the author had an intention to inform the reader about things she believes to be true. For one thing, many fictions are manifestly morally didactic – their aim is to inform or educate the reader about some moral issue. If we grant this – which obviously we should – then it would look *ad hoc* to exclude empirical facts from the sort of thing that authors of fictions can educate the reader about. Indeed, informing the reader of certain empirical facts may in certain cases be a partial means of making a moral case, as in the novel of Fowler’s just quoted from, which is generally about the ethical relation between humans and higher primates.

Certainly, readers often *act* as if authors of fictions can intend to inform them of empirical facts. For instance, sometimes readers treat fictions as culpably inaccurate. For instance, the novel *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown has been criticized for various historical and theological inaccuracies, notably by the Vatican<sup>7</sup>. Here it seems that people are responding to the perception of *misinformation*, and not just falsehood. They feel let down and angry, in a way directed at the author or director. Indeed, this feeling of a breach of trust has been identified by some as a hallmark of a response to false testimony (Moran 2006).

To claim that fictions contain testimony implies that readers are competent to detect the

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<sup>6</sup> For an account of how it is possible to simultaneously imagine and believe that *p*, see Stock (2011).

<sup>7</sup> Unknown (2006)

relevant information-conveying intentions of authors. I assume that most are, and that in particular cases a reader becomes aware of the relevant sort of intention via her grasp of certain conventions, which indicate that testimony is likely to be present. Of course she may not be explicitly aware of these conventions as such; rather, she may have come to understand them implicitly, via her practice in reading fiction. Though I can't give any precise or extended account of these conventions here, it seems likely that they include some combination of the following. First, the utterance will normally either be in the declarative mood, and be expressed in an authoritative-sounding tone. Second, it will be relatively easy and automatic for the reader to work out what exactly she is (let's assume) being instructed to believe. Gnomonic pronouncements won't count. Third, the utterance in question should appear to the reader as being likely to concern real existents: perhaps, that the reader has already heard of, or has some other reason to judge as actual. Perhaps the utterance appears to complement or extend other information the reader already possesses. (An appearance of likely truth in this way, along with other factors, is partial evidence of the relevant intention, since one - though not the only - plausible motive for including true content is that the author wishes to the reader to believe that content). Fourth, and relatedly, the utterance should be reasonably conceived as containing information that, if true, would be of potential use, interest or relevance to the reader. Or to put this point another way: the author should conceivably have a reason to want the reader to believe the claim in question. Often this reason will pertain to the theme or point of the larger work in which testimony figures. So, for instance, in the case of Fowler's *We Are Completely Beside Ourselves*, it is relatively easy to identify intentional truth-claims concerning historical instances of the mistreatment of apes and other higher non-human mammals; among other things, as noted they concern a topic obviously of moral concern to the author in the book as a whole, given its fictional content (about a family who adopts a chimp).

So: I suggest that by these and possibly other means too, it is often possible in principle for a competent reader to discern passages of testimony, as opposed to simply non-accidentally true statements in fiction. One might additionally worry at this point: doesn't the reader need to know that she is reading a fiction, before exercising her grasp on the relevant conventions? She does, but this has no bearing on the respectability of any beliefs she gains from testimony-in-fiction, once she knows this. Making assumptions about what sort of discourse or text one is engaging with, before being able to properly assessing it for the presence of testimony, is not a special requirement upon interpretation of fiction; it applies to texts and

utterances generally.

## 5. AAI and testimony-in-fiction

How does AAI, as a theory of fictional content, accommodate the presence of testimony in fiction? Relatively easily. Take the utterance from *Daniel Deronda* cited earlier. Effectively, on this view, Eliot reflexively intends the reader to imagine that it is true of the characters in that novel, that *there is a great deal of unmapped country within them which would have to be taken into account in an explanation of their gusts and storms*. She also intends the reader to imagine whatever implicitly follows from this in conjunction with other parts of the text and/or background knowledge. But simultaneously she intends the reader to *believe*, of humankind generally, of which she and the reader are part, that *there is a great deal of unmapped country within us which would have to be taken into account in an explanation of our gust and storms*.

Where a single utterance *u* functions like this simultaneously both as a vehicle of fictional content *p* (i.e. is an instruction to imagine that *p*, roughly) *and* as a piece of testimony, what, is the relation between the fictional content of *u*, and the content of *u* considered as a piece of testimony? AAI as just sketched out makes a pleasingly simple story available. On this account, many of the sub-processes involved in working out what one is intended to imagine will coincide with sub-processes involved in working out what one is intended to believe.

Let's forget about fictive utterance and focus for a minute upon pieces of testimony as they appear in ordinary conversation. How is the content of a conversational utterance determined? According to one popular view, the content of a conversational utterance is determined by the intentions of the speaker. On the one hand, the speaker intentionally makes use of 'sentence meaning'. According to most (though not all<sup>8</sup>), sentence meaning is determined truth-conditionally, by rule-bound conventions associating words with things. The speaker knowingly calls upon her understanding of conventions governing sentence meaning, and employs sentences presuming her audience will share this understanding. But at the same time the content of a conversational utterance usually also goes beyond sentence meaning, into territory traditionally characterised as pragmatics rather than semantics. A speaker's intentions may variously affect the referent of the sentence, anaphoric reference, and what is being implied or implicated by an utterer, in a way that can't just be recovered by appealing to conventional sentence meanings (Korta and Perry 2015). And in addition, a speaker may

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<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., Recanati (2003) and Grice himself (1957).

use irony or other implicature in a way which intentionally deviates from sentence meaning, sometimes even conveying its opposite.

If this brief sketch is even roughly right, then it looks like there is at least one close affinity between how conversational utterance, including testimony, gets its content, and the story about how fictive utterance gets its content according to AAI. Namely, both are determined by the intentions of a speaker. There is therefore a relatively seamless story available about how a single utterance might function both as a piece of testimony and a fictive utterance. In both cases the reader is working out what the author intended her to do. Moreover, it seems plausible that there will be a significant overlap in the strategies by which an author simultaneously conveys her intention that the reader believe something, and that she imagine something<sup>9</sup>. Or to put it another way, there will be a significant overlap in the methods by which the reader detects the relevant intention. In both cases she will in normal cases appeal to conventional sentence meaning; but in both cases she may also move beyond sentence meaning, using her understanding of pragmatics and non-conventional implicature as well. For instance, in the famous opening sentence of *Pride and Prejudice*, we are told that ‘It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife’. Clearly this is ironic: the reader is intended neither to imagine this sentence as literally and conventionally stated, nor believe it. Arguably, in fact, she is supposed to both imagine and believe the converse. Equally, when in *Vanity Fair* we are told by Thackeray that

‘When one man has been under very remarkable obligations to another, with whom he subsequently quarrels, a common sense of decency, as it were, makes of the former a much severer enemy than a mere stranger would be. To account for your own hard-heartedness and ingratitude in such a case, you are bound to prove the other party’s crime’<sup>10</sup>. (Thackeray 2003: 176)

we are not literally to believe (nor imagine) that ‘a common sense of decency, as it were’ is the source of the phenomenon described, but at most, that *thinking* one is acting out of decency is part of the self-deception which tends to accompany it. This is not part of the

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<sup>9</sup> NB My claim is emphatically *not* that the strategies will be *the same* in each case. Many content-discerning strategies seem relevant only to fiction. For instance, working out what a fictionally passage means symbolically, or what the use of a particular genre implies for fictional truths, does not seem to have any analogous procedure in the interpretation of non-fiction. For more on this, see Stock, forthcoming 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Thackeray (2003), p.176.

conventional sentence meaning but is still part both of the testimonial content of the sentence *and* its fictive content.

## 6. HI, VM, and testimony-in-fiction

At this point, a problem for HI and VM starts to emerge. We can put the point in terms of a dilemma.

I'll start with HI. On one horn of the dilemma, the advocate of HI attempts to interpret the content of testimony-in-fiction (but not, presumably, testimony generally) in a way that resembles the way that, she alleges, fictional content gets interpreted: that is, in terms of the putative intentions of some hypothetical utterer of those sentences, given a restricted body of knowledge about her and her context. The problem with this is that it would seem to sever any link between testimony-in-fiction and the production of *justified* beliefs in readers.

To see this, let's look again at the three models of justified testimony introduced earlier. Most obviously, there is a clash with the Assurance Model, according to which testimony gets its justification from being an intentional act of assurance on the part of the actual utterer, who takes responsibility for the truth of what is said. If we were to treat testimony-in-fiction as, effectively, the product of some hypothetical person who *might have* made utterances of this form, in a way which potentially came apart from what the actual author intended by the utterance, then there would be no coherent way of taking this hypothetical utterer as responsible for her utterances in the way demanded by this model of justification.

(Analogously, were we to interpret the content of a promise according to what a hypothetical utterer might have meant by it, in a way which potentially came apart from what the actual utterer actually meant by it, there would be no obvious sense in which trust in the actual utterer's promise would remain a live option). VM is just as problematic here, if not more so, for fairly obvious reasons: if the hearer is simply to construct the meaning of the testimony-in-fiction according to what would be most valuable to her, the crucial relationship with the actual author again appears to have dropped out altogether<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> An additional point is that, in fact, it seems that readers *can* build up (one-sided) relationships of what looks like trust with particular authors, who they come to recognise as wise and authoritative on certain areas or matters, emphasising that neither HI nor VM can be right here.

Meanwhile, on the *a posteriori* model, there are also problems connecting the content of testimony-in-fiction, construed in terms of HI or VM, with justification. Recall that on this model, a piece of testimony is justified where there is accompanying *a posteriori* evidence for its truth. If the claim is that for justification to obtain, the evidence in question must pertain to empirical facts about the actual utterer of the sentence (e.g. her sincerity, trustworthiness, reliability, or expertise) then straightaway we see how the HI or VM advocate attempting to analyse the content of testimony-in-fiction in terms of her preferred theory cannot easily appeal to any such factors. For she is (on this horn of the dilemma) not interested in the actual author at all. If on the other hand the supposedly justificatory facts in question concern inductive evidence of a *general* correlation between testimony and truth, then this isn't of much help either. For surely any such observed correlation must be thought of as holding between testimony *as ordinarily conceived* – i.e. as an utterance whose content is essentially connected to the actual utterer and her intentions – and truth. Were someone to claim that there was a reliable connection between testimony-in-fiction, conceived of as getting its content via HI, or even VM, and truth, then this would look empirically rather under-researched, at the very least.

Perhaps this last point won't convince everyone; but no matter, since a further point can be made which applies to all theories of testimonial justification, including the *a priori* one, about which I've yet said nothing. That is: on all of these models, *a posteriori* evidence of an actual author's dishonesty/ insincerity/ unreliability etc. will reduce or remove justification altogether. The point plausibly extends to testimony-in-fiction too: where we already know that an author of a fiction is unreliable epistemically, generally, it would normally be a bad idea to believe any testimony she produces in the context of her work.

Neither HI nor VM can account for this. The way in which one's knowledge of a given utterer's personal unreliability – knowledge of her insincerity, obtuseness or dishonesty, for instance - tends to undermine credence in that utterer's testimony would be inexplicable, were the testimony in question's content determined in a way which had nothing to do with the actual utterer's intentions. For, were the content of testimony-in-fiction determined in terms of the would-be responses of some idealized readership about what someone who wrote this text might have intended, as HI has it, or in terms of what would be most valuable to the reader, as VM would have it, then of what relevance could it be to the justification of any resulting beliefs, that the *actual* utterer of the testimony was insincere or dishonest in some way? None, it seems to me.

Thus far I've been exploring the first horn of a dilemma for HI and VM, according to which the content of testimony-in-fiction is determined according to either HI or VM; in which case, as I've argued, problems emerge for any secure connection to justified belief. On the other horn of the dilemma, the content of testimony-in-fiction is interpreted according to the standard story for testimony generally i.e. in terms of the intentions of the actual utterer, as briefly sketched above. The problem here is that there looks to be a fairly radical disconnect, according to HI and VM, in terms of the respective ways in which testimony-in-fiction gets its content and the way in which fictive utterances get their content. The former gets its content by reference to actual author intentions; the latter does not. And yet, I have argued, the very same sentence can function both to convey a fictive utterance and to convey a piece of testimony. If there were such a radical disconnect between reader strategies of interpretation, it seems that it would likely manifest in the reader's experience of such a sentence to a greater degree, since such different criteria for meaning are supposedly involved in each case. A piece of testimony-in-fiction would presumably be experienced more like a single utterance which functions for an interpreter both as an intentional utterance, on the one hand, and on the other, as evidence of some non-intentional phenomenon, such as dementia, or the unconscious use of a dialect one was studying; requiring a shift from seeing the utterance as essentially intentional in the latter sort of case. And yet, I suggest, reading testimony-in-fiction isn't like this. One seamlessly and relatively automatically understands both what one is supposed to imagine and what one is supposed to believe.

So, I suggest that, on this horn of the dilemma, HI and VM anticipate a split in the reader's interpretative practice and associated experience of testimony-in-fiction which we do not standardly find.

## **7. Conclusion**

Earlier I pointed out that AAI has a story readily available about the crossover in strategies used by the reader to interpret both fictive utterances and testimony-in-fiction. There is no predicted threat of a split in the reader's experience here, even though, to some extent, the strategies used to interpret fictional content and testimony-in-fiction will usually somewhat differ. Roughly, fictional content is produced via reference to the actual author's intentions that readers imagine certain things; while the content of testimony-in-fiction is produced via reference to the actual author's intentions that readers believe certain things. But in both

cases we are still dealing with actual authorial intentions, and moreover, it is likely that many of the methods by which one is deciphered will also apply to the other.

In conclusion: both hypothetical intentionalism and value-maximising theory have a hard time properly accounting for the role and experience of testimony-in-fiction. Either they cannot accommodate its potential function in the production of justified beliefs in readers, or they cannot accommodate the reader's experience of interpreting testimony-in-fiction in a way which seems continuous with the experience of interpreting fictive utterance. This, then, I take it, is yet another reason to prefer actual author intentionalism over its two main rivals.

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